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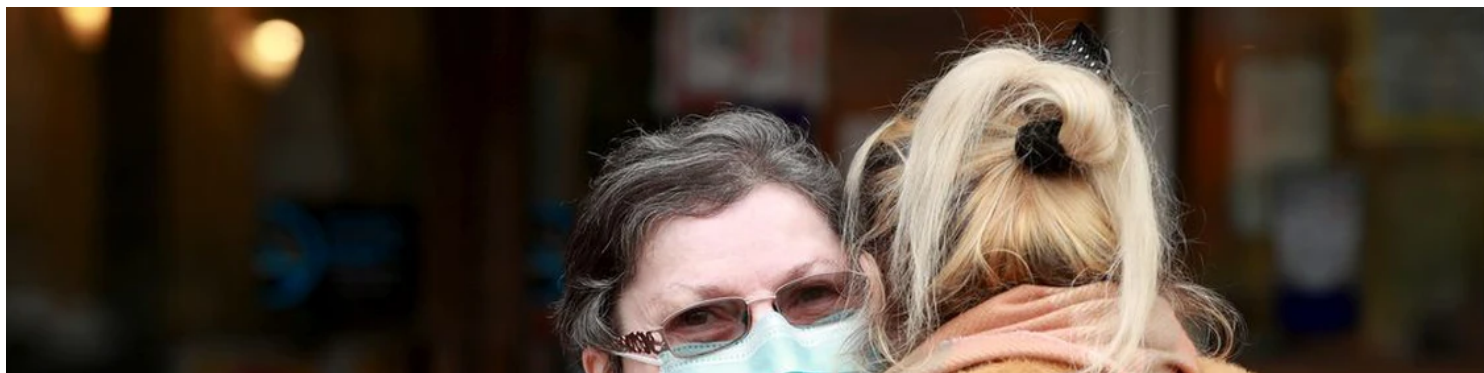


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'I truly believed if I did not get her out of the home, she would die': Sisters celebrate release from long-term care home

Elizabeth Payne

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Donna Mavis, right, has been trying to get her sister, June Mavis, 71, out of Ottawa's Extendicare West End Villa for months. The long-term-care facility experienced a COVID-19 outbreak in August. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia

After weeks of facing obstacles that kept her from leaving, June Mavis walked out of West End Villa Wednesday, headed to a new home with her sister Donna.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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“We are smiling under our masks,” said Donna Mavis as she and her sister embraced outside the front door of the long-term care home where 71-year-old June has lived since 2014.

Leaving long-term care, after months of trying



“I truly believed if I did not get her out of the home, she would die,” Donna said. “I thought (COVID-19) was a death sentence.”



Donna Mavis, right, has been trying to get her sister, June Mavis, 71, out of Ottawa's Extendicare West End Villa for months.
PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia

It was an emotional ending to a months-long struggle by the sisters to get June out of the long-term care home. And it is one that should never have happened, say advocates for the elderly.

Alyssa Lane, who is a lawyer with the Toronto-based Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, said homes do not have the authority to prevent residents from leaving or to put conditions on their ability to leave, as West End Villa tried to. Preventing June Mavis from leaving the home would amount to “illegal detention”, said Lane.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Donna Mavis began trying early last summer to bring her sister home to live with her, in part to protect her from COVID-19. She was terrified after seeing the devastation COVID-19 had wrought on long-term care homes during the first wave of the pandemic.

But Donna was told by an official at West End Villa that she didn't have legal authority to take her sister home. There was an error in a document giving her power of attorney over her sister, she was told, because dates on the document didn't match up.

Her sister could leave, she was told, if she passed a capacity assessment.

Donna said she struggled to know what to do and spent months trying to get help to bring her sister home. While she did that, her sister became sick.

Staff members at the home initially told Donna that no one at the home was sick and that her sister just had the sniffles. But June was infected with COVID-19.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Donna said they both cried when she talked to her sister on the phone about the diagnosis, thinking she might only have weeks to live. But June recovered.

June Mavis saying goodbye to some of the PSWs whom she'd grown fond of since entering West End Villa in 2014. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia

She was among the earliest residents of the home to become infected with COVID-19 in an outbreak that began in late August, leaving 20 dead and infecting 127 residents and staff. The home has since been placed under the management of The Ottawa Hospital.

“People were dying all around me,” June said Wednesday as she prepared to leave the home with her sister. “It was frightening.”

On Wednesday, Donna said she was expecting to face another hurdle in her quest to bring her sister home and was surprised to get a note saying her sister’s things would be ready when she came to pick her

up.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“I am so thrilled. I have been fighting to get her released for so long.”

In a statement, Extendicare, which owns the home, said residents can leave a long-term care home whenever they wish.

“The authority to make this decision rests with the resident if they are deemed competent or their designated power of attorney.”

But the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, which represented June Mavis, said West End Villa had no legal authority to prevent her from leaving or to require her to take a capacity assessment before she could leave.

“Should West End Villa prevent Ms. Mavis from leaving, this would constitute unlawful detention,” Lane wrote to the home.

Lane said earlier letters from the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly to the home’s director had gone unanswered.

Both Donna and June said they are looking forward to the next chapter in their lives.

“I am looking forward to being free, having fresh air and being outside,” said June.

On Wednesday, a small group of personal support workers gathered outside to say goodbye to June Mavis.

The sisters said they were looking forward to heading home to eat pizza and watch a movie.

June Mavis saying goodbye to some of the PSWs at West End Villa. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia



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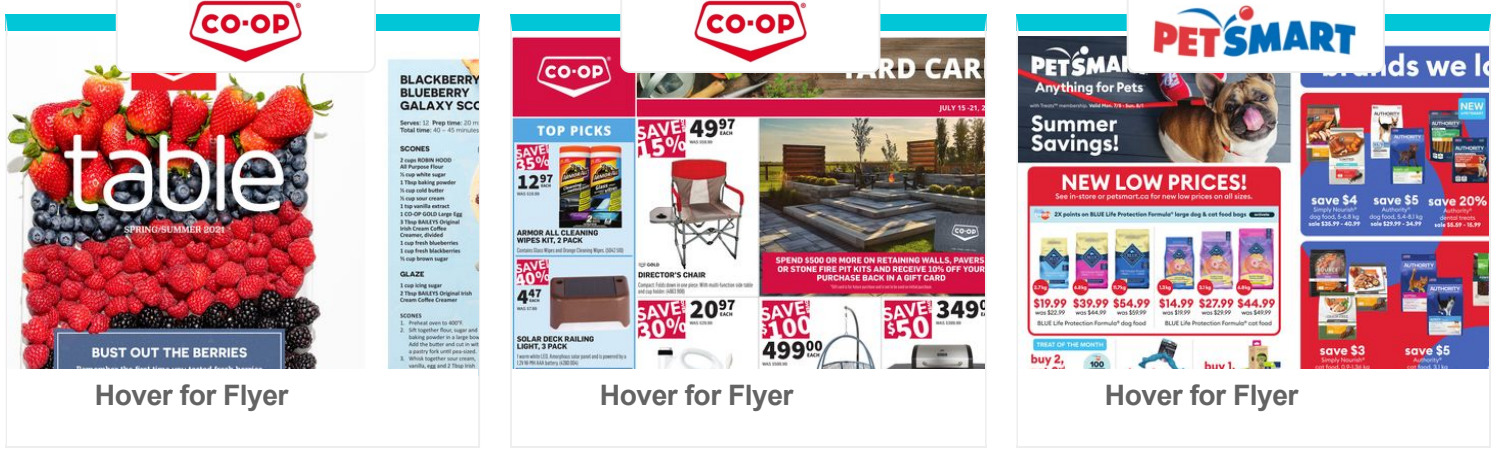
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